

Parent To Do's: Help Your Kids Do Great in School

by Lynn Liantos

It's a fact! Children whose parents are involved in their education have better grades, a more positive attitude toward school, and more appropriate school behavior than those with less involved parents.

Don't underestimate what you, as a parent, can contribute to your child's learning experiences, no matter how much education you yourself have. Getting involved in your child's education will make a huge difference.

Research studies consistently show that high student achievement and self-esteem are closely related to positive parental participation in education. Parents and schools need to work together so all children can succeed in school.

You, as a parent, have important knowledge about your child's likes, dislikes, needs, and problems that the school may not be aware of. You may also have ideas for improving your child's school.

But even though studies show that most parents want to be involved in their children's education, they may not be exactly sure how to go about it, especially if, like most parents, they work during the school day.

The following are questions that parents often ask and suggestions for what you can do:

What can I do to involve myself with my child's school?

- Visit your child's classroom. A visit will give you an idea of what your child does at school and how he or she interacts with other children.
- Volunteer to help in the classroom as an assistant. Listen to children read, for example, or serve as an aide for a couple of hours.
- Support student events and performances by helping with them (such as sewing costumes or painting scenery for a school play) and by attending them.
- If your school has a parent center, drop in to meet other parents there or to pick up information and materials.

- Participate in workshops that are offered, such as those on child development or concerns that parents have (or help plan such workshops).
- Take advantage of parent-teacher contracts (perhaps agreeing to read with your child for a certain amount of time each night).
- Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home and to supplement homework.
- Be part of decision-making committees about school issues and problems.
- Make choices, when available, about the classes, programs, or even schools your child attends.
- Stay aware of your child's progress compared to other students.

How can I help my child with homework?

Most teachers assign homework on a regular basis because practice is needed before children fully understand new skills or concepts. Homework also allows students to do more in-depth learning. Here are some general guidelines for helping with homework:

- Reward progress. Use lots of praise and display good work on the refrigerator.
- Find out how much and what type of homework is assigned in each class, how students are expected to prepare it and turn it in, and what students can do when they don't understand something. Help your child manage the workload by dividing it into small doses.
- Help your child develop a homework schedule that he or she can stick to.
- Talk to your child each day about homework assignments. Go over the work, see if it's complete, and ask questions about it, but don't do your child's homework for him or her.
- Provide a suitable place for study. If possible, make it quiet and away from the distractions of TV, phone, and loud music.
- Avoid making homework a punishment.

How can I make our home a good place for my child to learn?

- Have high expectations for your child's learning and behavior, both at home and at school.
- Praise and encourage your child.
- Emphasize effort and achievement, and be a role model for getting work done before play.
- Establish rules and routines in the home.
- Monitor television viewing.
- Limit after-school jobs and activities.
- Encourage your child to share information about school and respond with empathy.
- If you don't do anything else, read to your child or have him or her read to you every night. Encourage older children to read by showing that you yourself read (the newspaper, magazines, or books) and have interesting and appropriate books around your home for them.

What should I do if my child isn't doing well in school?

Contact your child's teacher. Don't wait for the school to contact you. It's important to resolve problems as soon as possible when they occur. When parents work with teachers, they are often able to improve a child's performance in school. Children also get the sense that education is really important when they see their parents involved with their teachers and their school. Parents feel a sense of accomplishment, too, when they help their children succeed in school. Ask your child's teacher for specific activities you can do at home with your child and help the teacher better understand what works best with your child. Make it clear that if the teacher sees a problem developing, you want to hear about it immediately. Then, meet with your child's teacher frequently until the problem is resolved.

What if my child doesn't like school?

Using your unique knowledge of your child, try to find out why he or she seems unhappy with school.

Observe and listen to your child. The problem may not lie with school itself, but with peers or friends. It may also be a family problem or an issue of self-esteem. Arrange for a conference with the teacher or school counselor. Work toward being able to discuss problems with your child openly, and listen carefully to his or her views before you offer any solutions.

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